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UNCLAS TUNIS 000619

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STATE FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE AND ACTING DIRECTOR  
OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE FORE FROM THE AMBASSADOR  
STATE ALSO FOR NEA/FO (WELCH AND GRAY), NEA/MAG (HARRIS AND  
HOPKINS), NEA/RA AND PM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MASS](#) [PTER](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: FMF IS KEY TO TUNISIA'S COUNTERTERRORISM SUCCESS

11. (SBU) I noted with disappointment that the State Department,s Fiscal Year 2008 budget proposal to Congress included only \$2.064 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) for Tunisia. This figure is significantly lower than the Embassy Tunis Country Team request of \$30 million in FMF for FY-08 or the \$8.075 million in FMF that Tunisia will receive in FY-07. Such a decrease will have a major impact on Tunisia, a historical partner in the Global War on Terror, as it faces a growing domestic and regional terrorist threat.

In January 2007, the GOT announced it had disrupted a Salafist plot to attack US and UK diplomatic interests in Tunisia. Regionally, Tunisia and the Maghreb are experiencing an increase in extremist activity, particularly the new threat of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. More broadly, anecdotal evidence suggests that Tunisians are disproportionately represented among foreign fighters entering Iraq and a significant percentage of suicide bombers in Iraq are said to be Tunisian.

12. (SBU) The Tunisian military is responsible for monitoring and supervising Tunisia,s borders and shares a strong apolitical military culture with the United States. The military is Tunisia's most professional and progressive institution, in a country that has disappointed in other areas. A large percentage of military officers have received US training, and the majority of Tunisia,s Army and Air Force equipment is American. However, this equipment is rapidly deteriorating and cannot be maintained without significant foreign assistance. The proposed reduction in FY-08 FMF represents a potentially crippling blow to Tunisian military capability. The Minister of National Defense has repeatedly and specifically asked for US FMF assistance to strengthen the military,s ability to control its borders, in cooperation with neighbors Algeria and Libya. This is the type of regional integration that the USG is encouraging through initiatives such as the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership. Severe cuts in US security assistance send the wrong message to a critical North African ally in the war on terror and hobble Tunisia,s ability to effectively combat terrorism.

13. (SBU) The \$2.064 million in FMF proposed for FY-08 is not sufficient to encourage Tunisian partnership in the Global War on Terror, further our bilateral military relations, or ensure Tunisia can combat terrorism. I very much hope that the FY-09 Foreign Assistance process, which is now underway in the Department, will result in significantly higher FMF for Tunisia. If this is not the case, Tunisia will be forced to look elsewhere (e.g., France, China) for military assistance. While Embassy Tunis will seek out every

opportunity for alternative US funding for the Tunisian military, I urge the Department to reverse this crippling decrease in FMF and fund significantly more assistance to Tunisia in FY-09.

GODEC